



Issue #5, Volume 19 May 29, 2026

# Virginia National Guard celebrates 419 years of service

The Virginia National Guard celebrated its 419th birthday May 14, 2026, during a ceremony in Richmond, Virginia. Virginia Gov. Abigail Spanberger provided remarks, while retired Maj. Gen. Timothy P. Williams, the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, read aloud the birthday proclamation.

Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, also gave remarks and ceremonially cut the birthday cake with Spc. Hope Lindquist, the youngest Virginia National Guard Soldier in attendance.

“Thank you for your commitment to our Commonwealth,” said Spanberger during the ceremony. “Thank you for your commitment to service and thank you for joining what is a storied, historic and vitally important element, not just in Virginia’s history, but of our nation’s history. Thank you for preserving the ideals that we are celebrating with our 250th anniversary of our nation’s founding and quest for independence.”

“For 419 years, here within Virginia, we have had citizens who have always been ready to stand for the peace, the security and the prosperity of their communities,” said Ring. “Today, citizens are choosing to serve, not for themselves, but on behalf of new communities, and most importantly, on behalf of the our nation, as we have for the last 419 years.”



Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and Spc. Hope Lindquist, the youngest Soldier in attendance, ceremonially cut a cake to celebrate the Virginia National Guard’s 419th birthday May 14, 2026, in Richmond, Virginia.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/mr3hcsm3>



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## VNG Airmen conduct cyber defense exercise in Finland

Six members of the Virginia Air National Guard participated in Locked Shields 2026, an international cyber defense exercise, April 11-25, 2026, in Jyväskylä, Finland. Virginia's participation was in support of the State Partnership Program, in which the VNG and Finland have been formally partnered since 2024.

The exercise is one of the largest international live-fire cyber defense exercises, bringing together about 4,000 participants from 40 nations. The six Virginia Airmen joined with their Finnish partners and other allied nations to enhance their skills in defending against complex cyber threats.

The exercise simulates a realistic, large-scale cyber conflict, testing participants' technical and strategic capabilities under pressure. The primary objective is to protect the vital services and critical infrastructure of a fictional nation, including power grids, satellite systems, and military networks, against a barrage of real-time cyberattacks.

"The participation of the Virginia Air National Guard in Locked Shields 2026 not only provided an invaluable, high-realism training opportunity but also served to strengthen the SPP relationship with Finland," said Capt. Muhammad Umair, a cyber warfare operations officer. "By training and operating alongside NATO allies, the Airmen enhanced their interoperability and contributed to the collective defense and readiness of U.S. forces in the European theater."

The Virginia National Guard established a formal partnership with Finland in May 2024 as part of the U.S. National Guard's State Partnership Program. The partnership was initiated to combine air operations and interoperability defense including defense against cyber threats, information and intelligence operations, combined land forces capability, military assistance and support for disaster operations, and special operations training.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/2p9yw2t7>

## Virginia National Guard Headlines

### Chaplain Sprouse promoted to Brigadier General

The VNG's Col. Benjamin Sprouse pinned on the rank of brigadier general during a ceremony May 3, 2026, in Richmond, Virginia. Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia presided over the ceremony and administered the oath of office.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/bdhakhza>

### VNG conducts mountain training in Tajikistan

Eight Virginia Army National Guard Soldiers conducted a mountain warfare exchange with members of the Tajikistan military April 27 – May 1, 2026, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/3jk3e9cy>

### Commonwealth ChalleNGe hosts Family Day

Commonwealth ChalleNGe Youth Academy staff, cadets and their families enjoy Class 64's Family Day May 9, 2026, at the State Military Reservation in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/2p9b926p>

### New VNG Soldiers recognized during Signing Day

Thirty-nine of the VaARNG's newest recruits participated in the Department of Veteran Services' Military Signing Day, held May 8, 2026, at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Virginia.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/bdhyatha>



**RTI HOSTS TAJIKS:** Maj. Gen. James W. Ring, the Adjutant General of Virginia, and Tajikistan's ambassador to the U.S. visit with Tajik military personnel as they conduct training with the 183rd RTI at Fort Pickett. More photos: <https://vngpao.info/2p9yyf8h>



# Miles, mud, minimal sleep

## Virginia Soldiers endure, impress at Region II Best Warrior

Rain, mud, exhaustion and unrelenting Appalachian terrain challenged Soldiers as they vied for the titles of Best Soldier and Best Noncommissioned Officer during the Region II Best Warrior Competition May 4-7, 2026, at Camp Dawson near Kingwood, West Virginia.

Representing the Virginia Army National Guard were Spc. Javan Cooper, an infantryman assigned to the 116th Mobile Brigade Combat Team, and Staff Sgt. Frederic Newton, a recruiter assigned to the Recruiting and Retention Battalion.

Cooper ultimately earned second place overall, while Newton finished third in the

noncommissioned officer category.

The multi-day event pushed 10 competitors through a relentless cycle of physical, mental and tactical challenges that left little room for rest or error. In total, competitors tackled 29 graded events and covered more than 25 miles on foot across Camp Dawson's training areas.

"You guys have all learned more about yourself and you've probably pushed harder in the last few days than you've ever had to push in a two-day period," said Command Sgt. Maj. James "Dusty" Jones, the senior enlisted advisor to the West Virginia National Guard.

The 12.5-mile ruck march remained one of the most memorable challenges.

"The ruck was pretty awful," Newton said. He also cited the stress shoot as his favorite event of the competition. "Transitioning

guns, shooting pistols and rifles — that's always good," he said.

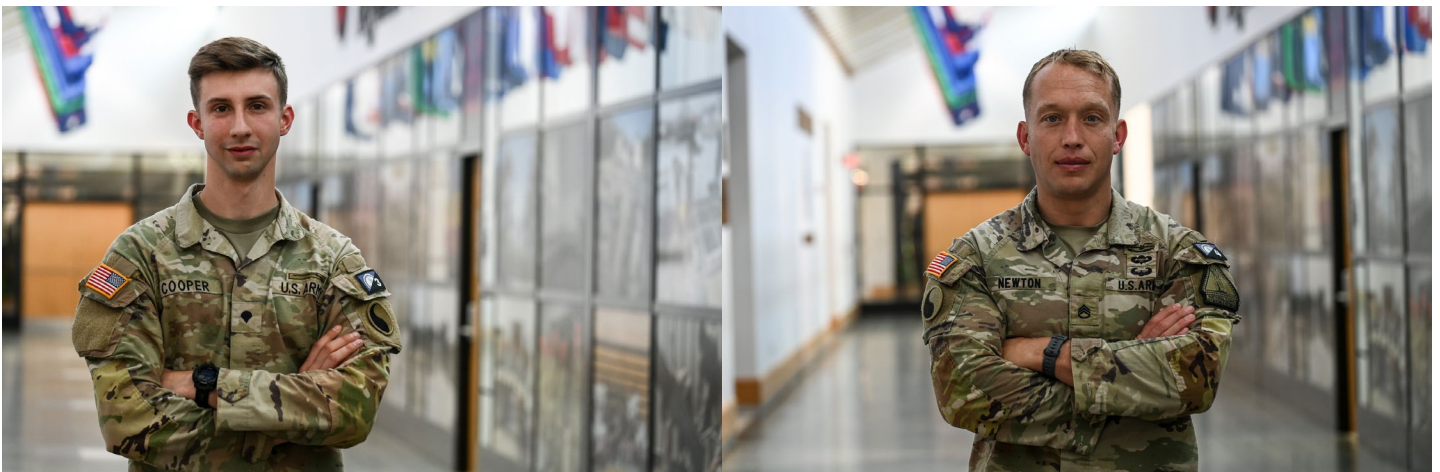
During especially difficult moments, Cooper said he leans on his faith.

"I usually just go to God," Cooper said about how he pushes through difficult moments during the competition. "That's just my religious beliefs and it gives me the motivation and the strength to continue on when it sucks."

While Maryland's NCO and Pennsylvania's Soldier claimed the top spots, both Cooper and Newton gained knowledge and experience.

"I gave it my best," Cooper said. "I'm proud of the work I put in and put out and, you know, sometimes it just doesn't go the way you want, but you do your best and that's all you can do."

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/ykf26mfj>



## More on the Web:

### Hendricksen succeeds Fretwell at 192nd

Chief Master Sgt. Jasen E. Hendricksen took responsibility as the 192nd Wing's command chief master sergeant during a ceremony, succeeding Chief Master Sgt. Sean Fretwell.

Read More: <https://vngpao.info/ydbxbexp>

### VNG Soldiers welcomed at First Formation

Soldiers newly-returned from Advanced Individual Training or One Station Unit Training, or newly-transferred from another state or component were welcomed to the VaARNG by leaders and unit representatives during an event dubbed First Formation May 14, 2026, in Richmond, Virginia.

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/vzj9c4nn>

### 192nd Wing tackles new fitness standards

The baseline testing window opened on March 1, 2026, and will continue through June 30, allowing members to test against the new standards without official scoring.

Read More: <https://vngpao.info/mt3ks4fm>

### 29th ID Band performs at Amelia Day festival

The Virginia National Guard's 29th Infantry Division Band performed at Amelia Day, a festival celebrating 291 years since the Central Virginia town's founding.

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/4ktm3uhz>

### Governor signs cyber defense response bill

Gov. Abigail Spanberger signed House Bill 1334, which adds cyber support to possible state active duty responses, during a ceremony May 14, 2026, in Richmond, Virginia.

Photos: <https://vngpao.info/yckpte7h>

## Glass takes command of 237th Engineers during CEC-I transition

Capt. Daniel B. Glass took command of the West Point-based 237th Engineer Company, 276th Engineer Battalion, 329th Regional Support Group from Capt. Trevon S. Johnson during a change of command ceremony April 10, 2026, at Fort Pickett, Virginia.

Lt. Col. Ryan P. Miner, commander of the 276th, presided over the ceremony and the traditional exchange of unit colors, signifying the transfer of command from Johnson to Glass.

The 237th is currently undergoing a conversion, and will become the 237th Combat Engineer Company - Infantry, or CEC-I. The newly converted unit will fall under the operational control of the 116th Mobile Brigade Combat Team, permitting the MBCT to task-organize and employ the CEC-I. Part

of the transformation will be deactivating the 229th Brigade Engineer Battalion, much of which will be absorbed into the CEC-I.

The transformation is expected to be complete later in 2026.

"The U.S. Army is transforming rapidly," said Glass. "The 237th CEC-I will be a combination of three legacy Brigade Engineer Battalion

companies, as well as a legacy sapper company," said Glass. "Transformation into a CEC-I represents a revival of the Combat Engineering discipline. It's a maneuver formation, designed to be self-supporting and tailorable, capable of breaching obstacles,

bridging gaps, building obstacles and digging in the infantry."

The transformation is part of a restructuring which includes the transition of the 116th Infantry Brigade Combat Team to a Mobile Brigade Combat Team, which was formalized in 2025. When complete, the CEC-I will be based in Freder-

"Transformation into a CEC-I represents a revival of the Combat Engineering discipline."

**Capt. Daniel Glass**

icksburg, with a detachment in West Point. The unit specializes and focuses on combat engineering, improving mobility for friendly forces, emplacing minefields and constructing fighting positions and fortifications.

Read more: <https://vngpao.info/hr7wuh78>

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